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Conference Abstract

Discovering New Fungal Species to Kick-Start a Passion for Science

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Abstract

Our recent project supported through Unlocking Curious Minds funding from New Zealand's Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment enabled us to introduce school students to the fascinating, yet frequently forgotten, fungal kingdom. In this project, we demystified the science of species discovery. We collaborated with students at three schools and initially introduced the fungal kingdom to students that ranged in age from 8–17. We then set out to find, discriminate, and describe a species new to science with each school.

We communicated with the students through social media and traditional means at each step of the discovery process, which culminated with the students visiting us at Manaaki Whenua-Landcare Research in Auckland. The students were given a tour of our two nationally significant collections, the New Zealand Fungarium and the International Collection of Microorganisms from Plants. During this visit we revealed the genus of the fungus that the students had discovered and the students chose the species epithets for each new fungal species. These new species were published in scientific papers in which the names of the students, and their main teachers, from each school were included. Our project enabled us not only to educate students about Fungi, which are often overlooked in

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school curricula, but also to introduce students to the importance of species discovery, taxonomy, and the role of collections.

Keywords

Education, Fungi, Nationally significant collections, Species discovery, Taxonomy

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